

LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

SEPTEMBER
1994

and provoke
me another
to love
and
good deeds



PROCESSED

6 1 2 1994

ULIBRAR

Hebrews 10:24

Provoke One Another

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XXXX Like cross-stitch, you can count on it: the business of being faithful can be tough, discouraging, formidable, messy, lonely. What's a Christian to do? Provoke one another to love and good deeds, encourage one another and meet together, says Hebrews 10:24-25.

The secular world, too, knows how quickly life—no matter how well-stitched—can unravel. The secular version of “provoke one another to love and good deeds” might well be “commit random acts of kindness and senseless beauty” (RAKASB). This catch-phrase seems to pop up everywhere—in books, on posters, on mugs, in Ann Landers (February 23, 1994), in LWT (see p. 26)!

In many ways RAKASB is a safer motto than provoke one another to love and good deeds. *Commit* sounds a bit softer than *provoke*. “Random acts of kindness and senseless beauty” could be an occasional inspiration, while “love and good deeds” sounds like work for a lifetime.

But we quibble. Why not claim both, douse them with the courage and compassion of the Holy Spirit, and lift them up with the eyes of faith. What might happen?

Provoke one another to love and good deeds:

- “Why don’t you call your sister and say you’re sorry?”
- “In this meeting we are going to listen carefully to one another and treat each other with respect.”
- “Kim’s adoption is final this week! Let’s pray for Jane, Bob, Kim and Kim’s birth mother on Sunday.”
- “On mom’s first heaven anniversary my friends from circle gave me a plant.

It read *Carpe Spem*—Seize the Hope.

- Please bring your canned goods to the food pantry on Sunday, and you “Offering of Letters.”

Commit random acts of kindness and senseless beauty

- “I know a little boy, who, when he comes to the Lord’s table, blows kisses to the ministers of the table. Senseless beauty!”
- “One of the women at an event I was leading came to me saying, ‘I’ve been wanting to give you a hug for several days—I just love you!’ It was a kindness shown.”

- “Elaine from church just told me that she’s praying for me during my exams. Wow!”

- “Grandma’s life on the farm is hard and she seems hard as a result . . . until you see her flowers. She grows flowers everywhere. Abundant, beautiful flowers.”

So when the business of being faithful gets tough, what’s a Christian to do

- a) Count on Jesus.
- b) Provoke one another to love and good deeds.
- c) Commit random acts of kindness and senseless beauty.
- d) Meet together and encourage one another.
- e) All of the above.

Susan Edison-Swenson

ON THE COVER:

Counted cross-stitch, designed and stitched by Susan Q. K. Swenson Edina, Minnesota, and charted by Betty A. Christiansen, St. Paul, Minnesota.

First sensible word!

Thank you for the article "Providing the Safe Place" [Charlotte Leichter, April LWT, p. 43]. This is the first sensible and sensitive word I have read [on] the drafting of the ELCA social statement on sexuality.

I read it to my circle and we expressed the concern that women in our church will be challenged to answer the call to make sure the church will indeed be a safe place for every woman and her family! Thank you for once again calling women to lead the way for the church to follow!

*Karin Mai
Piedmont, California*

Yes, yes!

What an excellent magazine—I read it from cover to cover as part of my daily devotions. LWT—wow! Thank you for the great May issue saying "yeses" to God. What an article by Gwen Carr ("On the Way," p. 10). Thanks for reminding me that following God is more than attending church, it is giving your entire life to God.

*Phyllis Jacobson
Spicer, Minnesota*

¡Si! We were wrong

On the cover of May 1994 I was dismayed noting your spelling of the Spanish ¡Si! (yes). Note: There is an accent on the "i." [When] you printed ¡Si! thus on a page full of "yeses," you wrote a Spanish "if"! Careful!

*Erin Beebe
Pullman, Washington*

Many thanks for the correction. We caught it, too—after it was in print! Unfortunately, in magazine work "we print every mistake we make."—ED.

Pushed to write

Having just completed reading the May 1994 Lutheran Woman Today, I'm strongly prompted (actually feel pushed) to write to you.

Being an avid reader and occasional free-lance writer, I must compliment you on a super-great issue. Every article was meaningful and an honor to God. The "Yes" articles really touched my heart—as did the article by Louise Newmember.

Because I was raised in a Bible-studying church and confirmed to Lutheranism as an adult, I felt

continued on page 2

Lutheran Woman Today (ISSN 0896-209X), a magazine for all women, is developed by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and published 11 times a year by Augsburg Fortress, 426 Fifth St., Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440. Lutheran Woman Today editorial offices are at 8765 Wiggins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631. Opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the writers and, except for the Women of the ELCA department and the Bible study, are not necessarily those of the Women of the ELCA.

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Send class postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing offices. Annual subscriptions: subscription rate, \$8.00 (regular or big print edition); individual, \$10.00 (regular or big print edition); outside North America add \$6.00 for postage. Single copies, \$1.35 (regular or big print edition). Audio edition for the visually impaired \$10.00. Payable in U.S. funds. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Lutheran Woman Today Circulation, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440-1209.

much as Louise N. did. My circle experiences were much like hers. Yes, I did serve and served others, for the Lord said we are to serve—but I felt a great spiritual hunger.

*Florence Berg
Belgrade, Minnesota*

Louise Newmember strikes chords

Re: How I Became a Woman of the ELCA (sort of) [May LWT]. Was it supposed to be funny? I didn't think so. From the start where she stated she was offended at being called one of the "ladies" (because she is a woman) and all through the article until the end, where she said a volleyball game would be better than dessert, as a member of the ELCA, I was offended.

I'm not going to argue every point, but I'm surprised that a good magazine like LWT would even publish the article.

*Pearl Berget
Bismarck, North Dakota*

I will not sign this letter, but in your spirit of peace-with-justice, my letter will be printed as well as the mean-spirited article by Louise Newmember [May LWT]. Yes, I am of the older generation of women and I was surprised and disappointed that you would allow such an attack and put-down of my generation.

I thought we were a congregation of believers and that we could "live together and love one another." It is not too exciting to visit the sick, go to the rest homes, bake a cake for a grief-stricken family, help settle refugees, stay married and not abort our children. It is not possible for me to go on a study trip to El Salvador, Nicaragua, Bosnia

or even the inner city. I can only serve my God where I am.

We do study the Bible at our W/ELCA meetings and we try to live as God would have us. We forgive often and we can forgive the "Louise Newmembers" in our church for their attack on us.

When the new members start their book club, let them begin with *The Strength to Love* by Martin Luther King. We understand the young women in our church and have compassion for them with raising a family and working at a full-time job. The article was very painful to read, and at my age it not good to be depressed even for a day.

*Seventy-two
in Rochester, Minnesota*

Dear Louise Newmember:

I was thrilled to read your article "How I Became a Woman of the ELCA (sort of)." I am a 28-year-old and also a pastor's wife. This is an issue that most churches must face. The young women are few and far between at gatherings of the church. The congregations and synods must ask what younger women and new members want and what things they would like to see happen. We have to provide things that attract younger women and new members to come to events. It may mean singing contemporary songs, playing active games, and definitely providing babysitting. As a mother of three, I can sympathize with those women that have to pay the cost to be involved in church activities. Please write more articles for the LWT magazine.

*Cindy Abbott
Rockford, Michigan*

My Name Is Poverty

Constance Miller

My name is poverty.

People are frightened to speak of me.

I am ugly, I do not bear pleasant images.

I rob people of their power—

What can they do about me? My name is poverty,

and I frighten people, I come too near,

I touch people's lives, I change people.

My name is poverty. I am your close neighbor.

I am not confined to far-away

places, in countries you read about

in the newspaper or see on TV.

Close to the lives of people you don't know,

and can't see.

My name is poverty. I am right here—in your country,

your city, your neighborhoods.

I bring into your schools children who have

no breakfast, no clean clothing, no homes.

I keep children out of your schools

and deny them education.

My name is poverty. I ensnare women and men.

I trap them—without enough skills

to get decent-paying jobs,

without people to care for the children

if parents are able to get work;

with too few options

that respect their worth and dignity.

My name is poverty. I come this morning

to join with you in conversation. I come to

hear and be heard. I come that we may have

communion with one another. **ACG**

Constance Miller is a seminarian at Wartburg Seminary. She is serving as an intern at Immanuel Lutheran in Seattle, Washington. She wrote this poem as an opening devotion for a church program on "Women and Children in Poverty."

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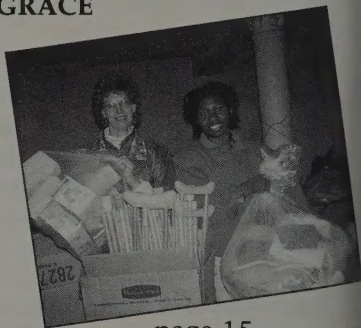
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Why don't you count yourself in on the project on page 43. It's just waiting for your touch and your own special creativity.

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Art & Photos:
 Eve Griffin, The Salt Lake Tribune, 19;
 Courtesy Lutheran Immigration and
 Refugee Service, 20; Sue Edison-Swift, 22;
 Sue Meyer, 34-37.

Correction:
 In the June '94 LWT, credit for issue planners was listed incorrectly. Credit for planning June should go to Liv Rosin of Minneapolis and Michele Belisle of White Bear Lake, Minnesota.

Our Holy Provoking Bible

Thomas W. Strieter

"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24, New Revised Standard Version).

Provoked . . .

When I was a child—one of eight in our family—I knew my mother's patience was frayed when she said, "Young man, don't provoke me!" Usually I had the common sense to quit while I was ahead, because to push her any further was to tempt fate.

As with my mother, the word *provoke* has negative connotations in society. We are provoked to anger or jealousy. But in Hebrews 10:24, provoke connotes positive action—to stir up each other to love and good deeds.

We often think of love and good deeds as warm fuzzies, those personal acts toward others that make them and us feel good. But Jesus calls us to more than just personal religion and making each other feel good. We are also called to stand out in front of the world like "a city on a hill," to be "salt and light" to the world (Matthew 5:13 and 14), to be the people of God in a world filled with alienation and error.

What Risky Business!

When Christians are provoked in positive ways to love and good deeds in public situations, our actions often take the form of a struggle for justice. For love seeks justice. And that can be risky business. Our love and good deeds may require us to resist actively those forces responsible for injustice, no matter the cost.

As Christians in a democratic society, we are called to critical participation, cooperating when government and society are acting justly, but resisting by speaking and acting prophetically when government and society act unjustly. And such Christian speech and action can be provoking—resounding positively for those who

have ears to hear," and negatively for those who will not. And for this we may have to pay, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, "the cost of discipleship."

We know from Jesus' parable of the last judgment that what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to Jesus (Matthew 25:40). But what can happen in our town when we push for housing for the homeless, a soup kitchen, or a hospice for AIDS patients? When love seeks to do justice, it can provoke people to say, "Not in MY backyard!"

Jesus' Compassionate Justice

We find the Jesus of the Bible constantly standing with the oppressed against the oppressors. Jesus stands with the poor and needy against those who don't and won't share. Jesus' action provoked the leaders of the temple to conspire to put him to death!

Recall the story of the woman, taken in the act of adultery, who was brought before Jesus to test him. Remember Jesus' response? "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7, Revised Standard Version). He appealed to conscience and counselled compassion, not obeying the letter of the law. How provocative of him! Love seeks justice.

Again, Jesus rebuked those who judge and reject when he defended the woman who anointed his feet with perfume and wiped her tears from his feet with her hair. Jesus scandalized the onlookers by recognizing and defending her. "... her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. . . ." And to his detractors he said, "... but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:36-50, RSV). What a provoking Jesus we have!

Shiphrah and Puah

Love seeks compassion; love seeks justice; love demands we resist evil.

There is a wonderful story about resisting evil authority in the book of Exodus. It tells of two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, who delivered babies when the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt. Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all the Hebrew boy children that they delivered. But Shiphrah and Puah feared God and would not obey Pharaoh. They lied to him, saying, "The Hebrew women gave birth before the midwives had chance to arrive! And their actions pleased God (see Exodus 1:15-21).

When Peter and John were forbidden by the Jewish Council to continue preaching in the name of Jesus, they

Love seeks justice.

replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, RSV).

So, following this biblical command, Christians throughout history have spoken out against unjust and idolatrous powers. They have served as a defense and refuge for those neglected and persecuted by an abuse of power. They were provoked to love and good deeds and in turn they provoked the state and society.

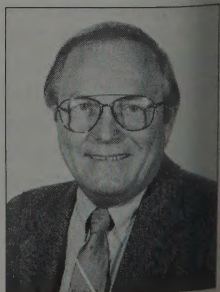
Le Chambon: A Holy, Provoking Town

A magnificent example of such provocation comes from the poor Huguenot (French Protestant) village of Le Chambon, a town of about 3500 in the mountains of southeastern France. The church in that village—led by its pastor, Andre Trocme—gave refuge, shelter and nurture to about 6000 Jews, mostly children, during the four-year Nazi occupation of France in World War II.

The authorities constantly harassed the pastor and warned him that if the people being sheltered were not surrendered, those responsible would be arrested. Pastor Trocme and the villagers boldly and defiantly refused to surrender these strangers to whom they had offered their protection, even at the risk of their lives. Pastor Trocme said, "We in Le Chambon resist unjust laws, we hide Jews, and we disobey your orders, but we do this in the name of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Not a single person was betrayed in those long and dangerous four years. To learn more about this story, read *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* by Philip P. Hallie (HarperCollins, 1985).

So, let us be about the task of provoking one another to love and good deeds—shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the gospel that shapes how Christians live, even in a "world of law." The gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to love and good deeds of compassion and justice. **ACG**

The Rev. Thomas W. Strieter, Th.D., has been in teaching and parish ministries for 36 years. He is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago, and is married to Doris Strieter. The Strieters have two adult daughters, Kris and Becky.



Mutual Consolation and Grace

Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson

Judy was driving me to the airport. We had met only two days before at an evangelical Lutheran Church in America event.

"This is an especially rough time for me right now," Judy began. "My son's partner is dying of AIDS. In fact, we don't expect him to make it through the day."

I could sense her hesitation in telling me this much. We were, after all, nearly strangers. So I gently asked, "Were you close to him?" Judy responded, "It's like losing someone of my own. He's become like a family member."

I tried to express my sorrow over her loss. We were quiet for a while. I knew the chances were high that behind this "mentioned" part of her suffering was a

secret grief that also needed expression.

So I ventured the next question. "Has your son also tested positive for HIV?" The tears began to well up, finally spilling the awful truth of her unspeakable sorrow. "Yes," she nodded. We both wept.

I searched my memory for words of consolation and remembered the 13th chapter of Hebrews: "I will never leave you or forsake you. . . . The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid" (verses 5-6).

I remember thinking that at least Judy would have the comfort of Christian community to help her through this troubled time. How reassuring

The tears began to well up,

that she would be surrounded by those who, like the Psalmist, believe that "[God] heals the broken-hearted, and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

"How has your congregation supported you?" I asked her. Judy's response stunned me. "There isn't anyone in the congregation I can tell," she said. "It isn't safe. I've heard their searing judg-

her spirit and her struggle.

Judy's story and our conversation are permanently etched in my memory and continue to trouble me. If we as the people of God cannot bring our brokenness to the foot of the cross in our local congregations, then where can we take it? If not here, where?

How did it happen—this silence imposed within the church around

difficult issues? It seems as if there are a host of subjects that are "unmentionable" in good many of our congregations. And most of these "don't-talk" subjects have to do with human sexuality, our bodies and/or the misuse of power over an

Instead of offering the wounded in our midst a place of healing, we camouflage their wounds so they don't seep into our midst.

ment of those who are gay or lesbian. It feels like a hateful crusade fought in the name of Jesus Christ.

"Even though they have no idea they're talking about my son, it exhausts me to try to cope with their indictments. My son turns to me in his despair. I have to preserve my spiritual strength so I have some word of hope to offer him. So this is a secret that I carry mostly alone."

I was numb. Here was a mother trying to wade through layers of grief. Yet in her congregation, there were no welcoming arms to stitch together the frayed edges of

other person.

Forbidden topics are conspicuously absent from most petitions in the church's prayers. How often do we pray for the victims of violence and for God's mercy to change the perpetrators of violence? Rape? Clergy sexual misconduct? Racism? Domestic violence? Those who have suffered any of these acts of violence rarely feel able to speak of them in church; nor are these acts often mentioned from our pulpits or in Bible studies or adult forums.

Hefty doses of denial make us believe that abuses of power do not

finally spilling the awful truth

occur within our own congregation. We try to keep the lid on touchy subjects at all costs, even if that means keeping the secrets of abusers and silencing those who are abused.

Instead of offering the wounded in our midst a place of healing, we camouflage their wounds so they won't seep into our midst. When that happens, we relegate our sisters and brothers in Christ to lives of shame, isolation and degradation. Yet St. Paul insisted in Romans 10 that "No one who believes in Jesus will be put to shame" (verse 11).

There are other issues about our bodies that are shrouded in secrecy as well. These, too, are noticeably absent from the prayers of the church.

A number of years ago, I prayed every day for five years that God would bless me with the birth of a child. I wanted a baby more than life itself. For the first three years, my prayer was for a pregnancy. I wanted to give birth to a child! But each month my hopes were dashed.

All the while I heard well-meaning, but insensitive comments from friends, like "Relax, go to the beach for the weekend and drink a bottle of wine." Others insisted that if we would adopt a baby, lo and behold—I would get pregnant. Everyone seemed to know someone who had done just that.

Later in my daily prayers, I asked only for a child. By now, adoption felt like a possible treasure. If only we could become parents! Now, during this odyssey, I longed for a church that would pray with me and others struggling with infertility. Why could we not lift up the condition of infertility at the table of grace?

Some of the most divisive issues before our church tend to be abortion, premarital sex, homosexuality, infidelity and AIDS. Otherwise decent and kind Christians often melt down at the mere mention of these things. Tempers flare, accusations abound and a toxic mean-spiritedness begins to infect the groundwater of our life together. For example, we pray for victims of cancer, but not for those inflicted with AIDS. Or worse yet, we pray for AIDS victims, but not for those who suffer condemnation because of their sexual orientation.

At the very least, we need a commitment in our congregations to lift up the needs of the whole people of God in prayer: "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you might be healed" (James 5:16). The most sensitive issues afflicting our community ought to be named often in our petitions before God—for the sake of healing and wholeness.

Why do we struggle over coming together to discuss the "tough stuff" of our lives? St. Paul offers

.....
f her unspeakable sorrow . . .

the first and most important reason why the tougher the issue, the more steadfast the church should be at offering a safe arena for moral conversation. He writes "Blessed be the God . . . of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

In other words, we are to talk about these issues precisely because we can be sure there will be individuals in our congregations afflicted by them! We must be intentional in offering a safe place for dialog.

Judy was imprisoned by shame and isolation when what she needed most was mutual consolation. Do we know that when we cut off others from God's grace in community, we also sever the whole community from the well of God's grace?

God gives us our marching orders: provide mutual consolation and grace to help in time of need. We could together, for example, provide a workable study process in our congregations, for pieces like the Human Sexuality Statement, one that will not allow a fracturing of the community joined in Christ.

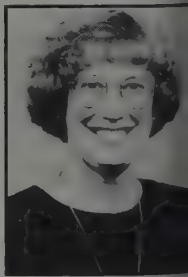
Last year at a synod assembly, I heard an ELCA bishop set clear

guidelines for assembly debate on human sexuality. "We will treat each other with dignity and respect," he said. "I will not tolerate personal attacks on a previous speaker. There will be no applause for one side or the other. We will offer each other kindness."

Scripture describes similar directions for our conversation. "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29).

How refreshing and upbuilding to set clear boundaries for adult forums and studies in our churches! There will be, of course, disagreements among us, but no topic is off-limits for community conversation. The more difficult an issue is to address, the deeper our resolve should be to examine it. **ACG**

The Rev. Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson, executive director of the ELCA's Division for Congregational Ministry, lives in Park Ridge, Illinois with her husband, the Rev. Mark Moller-Gunderson and two children.



"Yes," she nodded. We both wept.

Holy Provocation!

Lita Brusick Johnson

In the typical stance of an aggrieved 11-year-old, Kristin stood, hands on hips, leading with her chin. "Provoke not your children to anger," she cried defiantly.

Amazed that this paraphrase of Ephesians 6:4 found its way from a family discussion of the fourth commandment to this mother-daughter argument, Kristin's mother could only laugh. "No, not to anger," she said. "But I'm trying to provoke you into being kind to your sister!"

The writer of Hebrews suggests that such "provocation" has a place in our congregations as well: "... Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds..." (Hebrews 10:24).

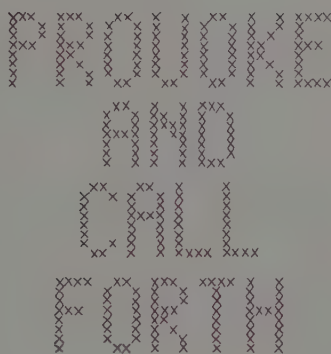
What a strange exhortation, since the word *provoke* has such a negative connotation. One thinks of a person prodding an animal with a stick, or picking at another's faults until she turns on you. Indeed, some of us are quite good at provoking to anger—especially when we're convinced we're

absolutely in the right.

But the writer of Hebrews seems to lift provocation to an art form. "Holy provocation" is not just about "process"—it is about end product as well: love and good deeds. Our English word *provoke* comes from the Latin word that means to "call forth." Indeed, "holy provocation" is about calling forth from our fellow Christians the love that is in all those who are members of the body of Christ. It is about helping them to grow into the persons

God intends them to be. And "holy provocation" is a two-way street. In our fellowship, we are called to be both the provokers and the provoked.

One doesn't need to speak with the "tongues of angels" to be a holy provoker. Every December, in the circle of a small mission congregation, the women gather to decide how to use the money raised by their white elephant sale. One year there seemed to be no pressing immediate need.



Some members wanted to give the money to the World Hunger Appeal; others wanted to keep it in case an emergency occurred in their congregation later in the year. The group was deadlocked. Then one woman commented that this "hunger stuff" was overplayed in the press. Bertha, a woman who had come to this country as a displaced person following World War II, spoke. The group fell silent, for Bertha never spoke during business sessions. She said, with both hesitation and painful remembrance, "No. Hunger is more terrible than you can imagine." That was all. But it was enough.

Bertha's nine words were the holiest of provocations. Out of her experience, she called forth from her fellow Christians both love and good deeds. She stated the reality that she knew to be true in the face of the false images that kept others comfortable in not loving.

While each of us, like Bertha, has both the call and the ability to be a "holy provoker," we have many different styles. Some of us are like pit bull terriers—grabbing on and not letting go—using a torrent of words to convince and change. Others provoke gently, teaching

by personal example. Still others are tentative, probing, or questioning as they seek to discern God's will.

Yet sometimes we are fearful that our provoking will cause conflict, that others will disagree with us and become angry, or will think of us "holier than thou."

**In Christ we can
provoke our fellow
Christians to love
and good deeds
without fear—and be
provoked—without
anger or
defensiveness.**

And we know that this fear is not unfounded—because we know how we react to being provoked. Does anyone really like being "stretched" into new thinking? Or having her comfortable assumptions challenged? Or having someone reflect God's light into the darker places of the soul, or of our life together?

When we are "provoked" in this way, it is extraordinarily difficult to withhold judgment and prayerfully consider what was said. Or, in a defensive reaction, like 11-year-old Kristin's, may be to say, "Don't provoke me to anger!" when what we really mean is, "Don't provoke me to love."

The vision of the writer of Hebrews is a community in Christ in which we can provoke our fellow Christians to love and good deeds without fear, anger or defensiveness. Is this an easy or an easily achievable vision? Definitely not—for each of us is both saint

and sinner! Is it a necessary reality for our church? Definitely!

Responding to a man who said he didn't need to go to church in order to be a good Christian, D.L. Moody is said to have pulled a blazing coal from the man's parlor fire and set it by itself on the slate hearth. It didn't take long for the coal to smolder and go out. We are like those coals. We need the heat and fire of others if we are—together—to burn brightly in the faith. So next time you are "provoked to love and good deeds" by someone else, let down your defen-

sive shields! And next time you fear to speak, be bold! For if our provoking—and our being provoked—begin with love and move toward love, it can only please God, who has kindled in each of us the fire of "holy provocation." **AC**

Lita Brusick Johnson, Chicago, Illinois, has served as Executive Assistant to Bishop Chilstrom since the beginning of the ELCA. She and her husband and 11-year-old daughter belong to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Chicago.

'A God-send"

From Ohio, with Love

Julie Dennison

Doctor, don't throw that out! Put it in the mission box."

Thanks to Susan Miller, member of Zoar Lutheran Church and surgical nurse from Perrysburg, Ohio, the staff of Toledo Hospital often remind each other that health-care supplies slated for disposal can be sent to places of need worldwide. Since 1992, Ohioans have collected truckloads of direct-patient care supplies like gauze, bandaids, gowns, antiseptics, nonprescription medications, disinfectants, and crutches. Dona-

tions have gone to Phebe Hospital, Liberia, and will go to the Dodoma Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, the companion synod of the Northwestern Ohio Synod.

For years Miller, a native of Indiana and health-care professional of 30 years, was concerned about waste in hospitals, physicians' offices, and care centers. In her surgical unit alone, approximately two dozen boxes of supplies are emptied daily. Operating-room standard practices dictate



Susan Miller and Matee Jackson, a Liberian, sort medical supplies for distribution

that unused supplies must be destroyed.

Says Miller, "Federal guidelines and regulations are great for our safety but result in lots and lots of waste." Tons of useful health supplies are burned annually in the United States.

The seed was planted when Miller attended a talk by Dr. Denis Radefeld, a member of the ELCA's Division for Global Mission Board who is active in Global Health Ministries. Global Health Ministries, an independent, pan-Lutheran organization, gathers and ships donated health-care equipment and supplies. Miller "stewed for months" about what she heard. She thought and thought of the many reasons why collecting supplies would be impossible.

Finally, Miller talked to Toledo Hospital administrators, expecting that would be the "end of it." She was amazed when managers were enthusiastic and told her to go ahead with this "great idea."

Miller put a big box in the utility room where supplies are unloaded and explained to colleagues the system of segregating usable supplies to prevent contamination. Once the box filled, she packed articles into heavy plastic bags and stored them in her garage. Soon the garage filled, and items were moved to a larger space at St. John's in Toledo to await sorting and shipment.

"It's really simple and easy," says Miller. "It is great to see supplies used, not destroyed. Everyone is happy, especially the hospital administration. Reducing waste is both cost effective and ecologically sound."

Miller has connected with Toledo Hospital co-workers in a special way. Colleagues enjoy proving each other ("Don't touch that with dirty gloves; it goes in the mission box") to collect more and more items. They have made collecting supplies a contest, vying with each other to see who can save the most items from the incinerator.

Local confirmation classes, youth choir, and young people from the synod youth event have also helped pack and load. They were very interested to know about the places where items are sent.

Two shipments have gone to Phebe Hospital in Liberia where civil war has created desperate need. The supplies are seen as "God-send" by the hospital staff.

The next shipment will soon go via Global Health Ministries to the Dodoma Diocese, Tanzania, to be distributed among the churches.



The GHM Connection

Global Health Ministries (GHM) works closely with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Division for Global Mission to assist in healing ministries worldwide. Founded in 1987 by Lutherans supportive of global health care, many of them former missionaries, GHM is a channel for direct involvement by individuals and congregations in Christ's healing ministry. GHM helps support Lutheran health care worldwide through prayer, by shipping needed medical supplies, by funding approved health-care projects, and by informing groups of opportunities and needs.

For more information about GHM, or for help in starting a GHM-related program, contact Ken Grosch, Director; Global Health Ministries; 122 W. Franklin, Suite 600; Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404 (612-870-1850).

rural clinics. At the top of Miller's prayer list is the use of a big truck to take items to St. Paul, Minnesota for shipping.

More and bigger trucks will likely be necessary in the future. Word is spreading. The Northwestern Ohio Synod Global Mission Committee publicized the project at the 1993 Synod Assembly, eliciting an "incredible" response from not only Lutheran congregations, but also ecumenically. The Korean United Methodist Church in Columbus heard about the collection from a Lutheran visitor and sent two boxes of supplies!

"People," says Miller, **"are the additional resources and are as important as the materials."** She keeps a notebook next to the phone to record and remember those who express interest.

Susan Miller encourages others to get involved in their own communities. She notes, "To begin, it only takes one interested person. Start small, provide opportunities to participate, and wait patiently for interested people to come to you."

Susan Miller often quotes Helen Keller: "I can't do a lot of things, but what I can do, I will do." **A C**

*The Rev. Julie
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director for
global educa-
tion in the
ELCA Divi-
sion for Global
Mission.*

Holy Provocation to Hospitality

Lily Wu

"Where are you from?" the hair stylist asked, as he shampooed my hair. "Oh, I'm from the United States, here," I replied, "How about you?"

"I'm from Hong Kong," he said, with just a hint of hesitation. I couldn't help but comment later, "You know, I thought you might be from Vietnam, but I guess I was wrong."

He was visibly taken aback. "How did you know?" he said, distressed. I assured him that it was fine with me—that I worked for the Lutheran church to help refugees, because we believe God loves and welcomes all people. We had a pleasant conversation after that, about his situation and about Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS).

The young shop worker wasn't off-base, unfortunately. He has learned that for many United States citizens today, refugees are not welcome.

Immigration and refugee issues might confuse and aggravate some church people, as well. We received a letter this spring from a

Lutheran who had read that in 1993, LIRS resettled 9000 refugees from 46 countries—and she "was shocked. Our country cannot take every person who wants to come here," she wrote. We would "go down the drain, and then who is going to help us?" She believed that newcomers brought problems such as gangs and violence as well. "It's not that I don't feel sorry," she explained. "But we can't continue to take everyone when we have a lot of our own suffering. It's time to start being responsible and thinking of the future for our grandchildren too."

Her letter seemed to express what a number of people are feeling about our ministry. Indeed, immigration and refugee issues seem to bring out all emotions, and the need to defend positions. People don't like to feel they are being forced to change, especially by strangers who are not like them and don't seem to be giving anything back. But as United States citizens we are also susceptible to social amnesia. "We don't need 'em, we don't want 'em," some ma-

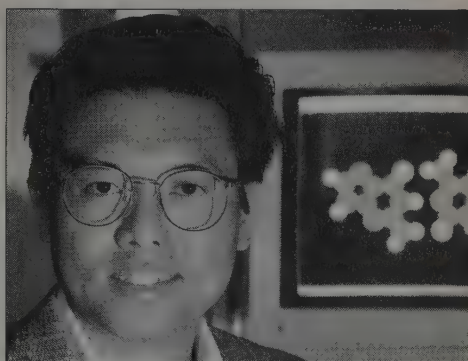
...y of newcomers. Yet they
ouldn't say that their own immi-
grant/refugee parents or grand-
parents were bad for this country!

Our deepest human fear

These issues touch our deepest
fear as human beings: that we will
be the ones left out in the cold.
That when we are in trouble, no
one will be there to help us. One
could debate the issues hotly for
hours and still get nowhere—be-
cause it really is a faith issue and
one that requires struggle. But it
is very important to ask, "What
are we struggling against? And to
what end? Will being angry at
refugees, or seeking to bar them
from entering the United States,
mean an end to our problems here?
Or is the 'us' vs. 'them' debate only
drawing us away from God and the
real issues?"

In my mind, when emotions are
high and confusion runs rampant,
this is the perfect time to pray hard:
"God, what would you have me
learn from this? What do you want
me to see and to do?" God is a pro-
tector and defender, especially of
those who have no one to speak for

them. So says Leviticus 19:34 and
Psalm 72:12-14 and Proverbs



Thanh Truong came as a teenager in
1980 to a Lutheran farm family. Now a
chemistry professor, he's engaged in
cancer research. He chose his career
"to give something back."

31:8-9. When we are protective of
our family and others dear to us,
that's a beautiful thing; it shows
relationship and a love that cares.
After all, we are God's people,
called to bring hospitality and
hope into a hostile world. That
means God will empower us, not
only to care for "our own," but also
for other human beings who are
precious in God's sight.

Isn't it a great joy to find people

Just Imagine

Imagine you are standing in a hall that is rapidly shrinking in
size and will no longer sustain your life. Suddenly you see a door
open, and you run through it. There are many people behind
that door, all speaking a language you do not know. But you try
to read their expressions to see if they will welcome you or not.

Now imagine you are one of the people already in the room.
What kind of expression is on your face when the door opens?

—LW

who care about you, especially when you are vulnerable? We love finding such people. So why not create situations that bring this



Alemi Daba, a Lutheran in Ethiopia, was imprisoned for "heinous crimes" such as asking questions or conducting a Bible study. Granted political asylum in 1989, Alemi Daba is now a case-worker with a Lutheran social service agency.

out in people, so that a spirit like this can grow? God meant for us to find and build connections with other human beings. Stepping out first to help refugees is a healing ministry that leads to growing in wholeness for both newcomer and those who help.

Some facts, some stories

One out of every 100 people in the world is a refugee. Half of the world's refugees are children; another 30 percent are women. Fewer than 1 percent of all refugees come to the United States. Eight of every 10 persons who come—whether as immigrants or refugees—come legally. Of these,

75 percent are wives being reunited with husbands, children with parents, brothers with sisters.

Who are some of the latest newcomers? People like Kijana Dzamonja and her husband Dario, Bosnian refugees—who are grateful to be living at all—now living in Madison, Wisconsin. In Sarajevo, they crawled from room to room to avoid sniper fire, and at one point had nothing to eat but grass from a local park. The first day they bought groceries in Madison, "we felt like dancing, it felt so good," Kijana says. Yes, refugees are people who desperately need safety from war, persecution, atrocities and fear.

Thanh Truong came as a teenager in 1980 to a Lutheran farm family, the Andersons, near Menahga, Minnesota. Now 31, he is a chemistry professor in Salt Lake City, Utah, and receives \$500,000 in funding from the National Science Foundation for cancer research. Foster mother Donna Anderson recalls him saying, "You know, mom, we can keep taking and not give something back," as he pondered how to make a living. In fact, most refugees give back far more than they ever use in benefits, paying more in taxes than they use in services.

Sometimes refugees enter and ask for political asylum. That was Alemi Daba's situation. A Lutheran in Ethiopia, she was imprisoned seven times for "heinous crimes" such as asking questions or conducting a Bible study. Each time she was sent to prison, she got a strange rash that the prison

officials feared was leprosy, so they would release her again. Her older brother died of torture; she had to leave her husband (who later died), and came to the United States with two small children, on a medical visa.

Granted political asylum in 1989, Alemi Daba is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in San Diego, a caseworker with Lutheran Social Services, and has received recognition for her volunteerism. "I just want to give back what has been given to me," she says. "To help others is my major goal. To live in this blessed country is a miracle for me and my children. I say, 'Thank you' for letting me in."

World's skewed priorities"

A colleague at LIRS notes that refugees overseas and needy people at home are not in competition with each other. They are both in competition with the world's skewed priorities." Some churches like St. Stephen in Longwood, Florida, have discovered that helping refugees and the U.S. unemployed need not be a competition. Over the last 16 years the congregation has sponsored families from Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Laos—and this year is sponsoring a homeless family in the U.S.

Of course, all the facts in the world don't mean much when we're afraid. And this is exactly the beauty of LIRS ministry: to bring people together so that we don't need to fear, to lay a groundwork for community so that we can find solutions. As the controversy

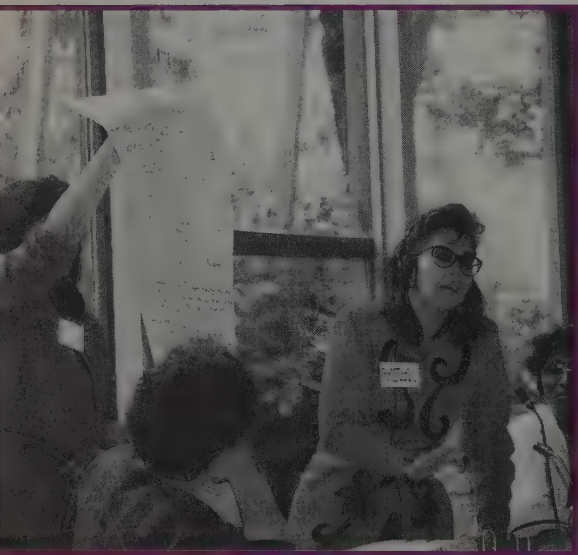
heats up, we will insist that being grudging and nasty to uprooted people is not what the church stands for. Instead we stand for giving people chances to live, just as God gives us chances, over and over again. This is the holy provocation that LIRS ministry is about. **ACG**

Lily Wu is manager for promotion and editorial services at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and is secretary of the board of directors of Lutheran Human Relations Association, Milwaukee. She is a member of Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, in Queens, New York.

How to support LIRS ministry:

- Look for answers in immigration and refugee discussions. Help the debate; make it rational—not based on emotion only, and misperceptions.
- Be aware of attempts to pit people against one another.
- Find good news by volunteering or helping in other ways.
- Ask LIRS for further information. We need faithful people to uphold this ministry. LIRS may be reached at 390 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016-8803, or 1-212-532-6350. —LW •

The Power of Community



Ingrid Christiansen

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another . . .” (Hebrews 10:24-25, *New International Version*).

What wonderful encouragement to us these verses represent! Two ideas from them run counter to much of my

experience in the world, and in the church: the idea of *stirring up* one another to action (*provoking* or *spurring* in some Bibles), and the idea of doing this in community not by ourselves.

Many of us are not comfortable doing advocacy, even for people and causes in which we believe deeply. However, Hebrews encourages us to stir up one other to do more of the very kind of work so many of us find hard! It advises us to *meet together*: to listen to each other, exchange ideas, support one another, challenge and coax one another, as we do our good works. This encouragement to *meet together* is key to our ability to act. For in community we find the courage and wisdom to act, and act wisely. Indeed, those of us who want to act faithfully and well in the world are in great need of each other.

Modern life gives us little encouragement to take ourselves seriously as members of any community—church, civic group, neighborhood, even family. Many of us don’t know our neighbors well, we don’t live close to our extended families, often don’t work near where we live.

A well-known research project reveals the power of community. In this project, about 80 percent of graduate student researchers would actually administer what they believed were *deadly* levels of electric shocks (though in fact they were not lethal) to their "subjects" unless one of the researchers would object loudly. As the objections mounted, the numbers of others willing to carry on the experiment would drop dramatically—to under 20 percent!

Groups do have power. Groups can give us courage, can mold us to do good or evil, to be cheerful or sour, to move toward or away from courageous acts, or from any acts at all.

In my role as board chair for the Division for Church in Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I have noted that social statements or study documents in the church are viewed variously, often depending on the way an individual congregation has used a study. Such statements can be viewed in two ways. Some see them as potentially dangerous, troublesome intrusions which, if you look at the ideas in them, might hurt you. Others view them as opportunities to talk about ideas related to faith and life.

Many Lutheran women have seen the purpose and potential of the church's social statements. Why? Because Lutheran women are faithful in Bible study. And the church's social statements, including the current draft on human sexuality, are wonderful opportunities to do Bible study. In fact, they are designed to be studied along with Scripture.

As Lutherans, we sometimes gather in community to discuss hard ideas which could generate different opinions and strong disagreement with one another, but which could also *stir us up* to do good works. We all have a gift to bring to such a conversation. We have a compelling center to our lives: God's grace expressed in the ultimate gift of Jesus, and our belief in that grace. With that faith, we can talk about difficult ideas, and give respect and encouragement to one another's work, just as Hebrews suggests.

I know of nothing else in our lives that has the kind of power to bring us all to the same table—not politics, nor common work, nor ethnic backgrounds. For Christians, only *Jesus*—the center of our lives—will do it.

So let us "meet together"—in study groups, in community and advocacy meetings, in adult education forums, in any new ways we can invent. Let us encourage each other to tackle tough issues in the assurance that our center, Jesus Christ, cannot fail. **ACG**

Ingrid Christiansen is director of the Urban Studies program of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. She chairs the Board of the Division for Church in Society of the ELCA. She and her husband, Jody Kretzmann, have two children.



On Being an Irritant

Jean Martensen

On a cold Saturday morning last February, thousands of young people streamed into the field house at St. Olaf College to hear Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, speak on the importance of human rights. Townspeople, faculty, guests and students from five midwestern Lutheran colleges—they had come to get a glimpse of this brave woman, a living threat to authoritarian governments. Even though Rigoberta Menchu has experienced tremendous personal losses, she is not bowed by grief. Although the deaths of her family members and friends were, in fact, brutal murders, she reveals no bitterness or need for revenge. And though the temptation to hide, be silent, become “cooperative,” or flee must be enormous, she continues to organize and witness for the rights of indigenous people in Guatemala, her home and for the indigenous everywhere.

Stories of adventure and narrow escape punctuated Menchu’s talk that day. Her message was clear: The dignity, values, and beauty inherent in all cultures must be honored. If her answers to the audience’s questions that followed could be summarized, they would sound something like this:

“Please don’t study us anymore. We don’t need any more academic treatises or donations for a subsistence survival. We seek only your respect. If you say you are concerned about the threats to our existence, then stand with us. Support our efforts to preserve our cultures and advocate with us. Above all, do not romanticize us. Although we love the earth and care for it, we do not wish to be included on a list of endangered species. We are your brothers and sisters.”

the world's family of peoples. eat us accordingly."

By her vision and sturdy resistance, Menchu gives meaning to the text from Hebrews calling us to stir up one another to love and good works" (10:24, RSV). Today, I thought about Rigoberta Menchu, model provocer, my husband and I got notes from our two daughters—each an irritant in her own way, "an advocate of good works."

Our youngest faxed us from Kathmandu, Nepal, where she had completed the first week of a week journey through northern India, Nepal and Tibet. We were relieved to hear from her. She had time to talk to refugees of political oppression living in camps, and to interview aid workers and cajole government officials there into sharing some insights into the lives of the uprooted.

The trip held some danger for her and for those who talked to her. As parents, we are both proud and worried as she gathered information, photos and videotapes for international human-rights organization, one of those troublesome non-governmental voices that insist on telling the truth when governments threaten the lives of their own people.

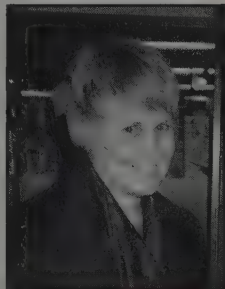
Our oldest also moves against the current. She called to tell us that her enthusiasm for learning had resulted in some exciting news: she was being considered for an exciting, new and more demanding post in her field. As a high school teacher, she insists on high performance in a noncompetitive classroom, searching for fresh ways to motivate young people to learn French very well.

She provokes her students to excellence.

In between these messages, a colleague told me of an experience that spurred her to action. Alarmed by her young daughter's fear of a bully on the school bus, my colleague went directly to her daughter's principal. The bully, a boy, had said repeatedly that he would kill the first-grade girl. Though both children are in elementary school, the familiar cry, "I'll kill you!" cannot be considered a wild and thoughtless threat. In an era where five-year-olds can bring loaded guns to Show-and-Tell, parents can't dismiss such threats. If we are to make the world safe, we must push and provoke for peace in our own neighborhoods.

Rigoberta Menchu, my daughters and my colleague . . . with their stirrings, each of these women encourages and provokes toward good works. Their actions underscore the faithfulness of God. In an often frightened and fragmented world, let us, in the words of Hebrews, "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. . . ." **A**

Jean Martensen is director for education for the Commission for Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



Kindness and Beauty Rampant in World

Marj Leegard

What would happen if we all practiced *random acts of kindness and senseless beauty*? We just might “stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24, Revised Standard Version). If we are to *provoke* (that’s New Revised Standard Version for *stir up*) one another to practice kindness and beauty, love and good works, we must tell our stories of beauty and kindness.

Stories stir us

Our circle finished the Bible study, and—knowing I had this piece to write—I asked if we could talk about beauty.

“Beauty,” I said, “is the picture Doris painted of a house at dusk. There is a fading light but the windows of the farm house are glowing with a welcoming light. On the road someone is coming home. Coming home at evening is beautiful.”

Families are beautiful

Alice can look out of her window at the yard shared by the next generation. “The sight of our grandchildren playing where our children played is beautiful,” she commented.

Hearts put on doors

Pam, home on break from college, reported, “The women in our dorm use red paper hearts for messages. It is beautiful to come home and find a heart message on my door.”

Beauty abounds in creation

Alice Ann spoke in such a soft, shy voice that the awe of creation shone through. “There is a moment,” she said, “when a calf is born that is beautiful. The first breath comes. There is a struggle to stand, and the mother cow talks gently to her calf. I think that is a beautiful moment.”



Flowers are generous beauty

Arleen noted, “There are lots of flowers in a lifetime but none are so beautiful as the little, tight fistful of dandelions that are picked just for grandmother.”

“You’ll Never Walk Alone” is beautiful

“Nobody has said anything about music,” Doris added. “I like all



music—almost—but the most beautiful song is ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone.’ It reminds me that

ough I live alone, now I have One who walks beside me. It reminds me, too, that my children and my friends keep me from being lonely.”

elcome is beautiful

ere are beautiful sounds that are not exactly music,” Grace said. Now about the shout, ‘Grandma here!’ when I arrive on my son’s doorstep?”

ndness comes from the kitchen

ndness is Jeanette in her kitchen. It is no use to tell Jeanette not to fuss, for fuss is what that old heart loves to do. She bakes as light as sunshine and as fragrant as newly harvested wheat.

Everyone knows about her cookies, her candy and pies, perfect as pictures. The book, come from her oven and her generosity. All this bounty for her guests and friends who had a taste of kitchen kindness.



riends are kindness with skin

embers of Lydia circle pondered kindness for only a moment before they all began to speak at once.

Bernice said, “Norman was digging in the hard ground and making much progress when a neighbor we had not yet met

came with his tiller and did a great job. He did in minutes what Norman could not do in hours.”

• Arleen said, “Kindness is coming home from the hospital with a new baby and finding a friend baking cookies for the other children.”

• Grace said, “A neighbor came over to play games all night with our son who had to stay awake for a sleep-deprivation test.”

• “Well,” Maude said, “when my husband was sick a big group of neighbors came and plowed the whole farm.”

What kindness and beauty stirs you?

We talked about kindness and beauty at the table and after we were home and when we greeted each other again on Sunday morning.

“... whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (*Philippians 4:8, RSV*). ☐



LWT Columnist Marj Leegard is a semi-retired beef farmer from Detroit Lakes, Minnesota and an active Lutheran.



Session 9: Once for All

Craig and Nancy Koester
Study Text:
Hebrews 10:1-39



Memory Verse

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful . . ." (Hebrews 10:23).

Overview

People of all times and places have used religious rituals to mark important events like births and deaths. They have also used religious practices, such as sacrifice, to secure God's favor and protection. But now the work of Christ on our behalf has put religious rituals in a whole new light. Hebrews 10 explores what God really wants from us. Even more important, it describes what Christ has done on our behalf. We still need religious rituals, rites and sacraments; but now, because of Jesus, we worship God and do good works because God has first loved us.

Opening

Sing or say the words to "Jesus, Your Blood and Righteousness" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 302).

By a Single Offering

The author of Hebrews often uses contrasts to show that Christ is better than all that has gone before. For example, the old priesthood is contrasted with Christ's priesthood (see Hebrews 7:23-24); the old sanctuary is compared to the new (see Hebrews 9:1 and following); the old covenant is measured against the new (see Hebrews 8:6-7). Now in Chapter 10, another contrast appears: The Old Testament sacrifices are compared to the sacrifice Christ offered on our behalf.

Christians at the time Hebrews was written had to de-

with questions regarding sacrifices and other religious observances. **Read Hebrews 10:1-10.** Sacrifices were among the most important practices prescribed by the Law of Moses. These sacrifices were not supposed to be a heavy burden on the people, but rather a visible means through which they could receive forgiveness from God.

- According to verses 3-4 of chapter 10, what is the only thing these sacrifices seem to emphasize?

The Old Testament also includes many passages that criticize sacrifices. The objections and questions usually came from the prophets. Prophets charged that the sacrifices made people complacent; for example, some people assumed that they could live as they pleased, exploiting others as long as the correct offerings were brought to God.

Verses 5-7 quote Psalm 40:6-8, and reflect the words of the prophets in warning against excessive ritual.

2. **Read Amos 5:21-24 and Hosea 6:6.**

Why does God despise their feasts and refuse to accept their sacrifices? (See Amos 2:6-7; 4:1.) According to Hebrews 10:8 and Psalm 40:8, what does God really want?

Read Hebrews 10:11-18. In this passage, the author of Hebrews summarizes the results of Christ's sacrifice and reminds his readers that Christ is both **priest** and **king**. This passage also picks up the wonderful words of Jeremiah about "covenant" and "remembering sins no more" (see Jeremiah 31:31-34) that is in fuller form in Hebrews 8:8-12.

- According to Hebrews 10:11-18, what makes the sacrifices offered by Christ different from the ones offered by the priests?

Love and Good Works

Good works are one important way in which Christians seek to share with all people the love revealed in Christ. The author of Hebrews frequently reminds his readers of what Christ has done for them, and then goes on to exhort and encourage them to live out their faith.

4. Read verses 19-25. According to verses 19-21, what has Jesus done for us? According to verses 22-25, what does the author of Hebrews want Christians to do? (Note especially what follows the words "let us.")

Verse 22 most likely refers to Baptism, in which we are "sprinkled clean . . . washed with pure water." Like Jesus' death, Baptism is a one-time event. Through Baptism, we become children of God. Yet many people who are baptized or who seek Baptism for their children, do not participate in the life of the church, or show any sense of commitment to Christ. The following story illustrates the problem:

One day a man walked into a pastor's office. "I want to have my two-year-old daughter baptized," he announced. The man said that he did not belong to any church, but had found this congregation listed in the phone book.

"Would you like to visit and maybe become involved in this congregation? We would be glad to have you worship with us," the pastor said.

"No, thanks just the same," the man replied. "I am not a Christian."

"Then why do you want your child baptized?" the pastor asked.

"My parents insist on it, and I want to keep them happy. I personally can't see anything in religion, but you never know, maybe my daughter will."

The pastor took the man's name and phone number and asked for some time to think.

- If you were the pastor, how would you respond? Beyond a simple yes or no answer, describe what you would like to say to this parent. If you would refuse to baptize the child, give the reasons. If you would agree to baptize the child, give reasons. If you would seek further conversation with this parent before making a decision, what would you talk about?

People of faith must sometimes make decisions: At what age should children receive communion? Is it ever right for a pastor to refuse to marry a couple? Must at least one parent be a Christian before an infant can be baptized? How long should people remain on the membership rolls after they have ceased to participate in the life of the congregation? These are only some of the questions that confront pastors and members of congregations.

Read Hebrews 10:25. In this verse the author refers to Christians who are habitually absent from worship. Every congregation faces the problem of what to do about inactive members—that is, those who are physically able to come to church but seldom or never do.

In verse 24 the author says we are to “consider how to stir one another to love and good works.”

- How are people stirred up to good works within your own community of faith, whether family, women’s group or congregation? Share a specific activity or project that was carried out because someone took the initiative and motivated others to take part.

Fearful Thing, a Great Reward

The Old Testament distinguishes between willful and “unintentional” or unintentional sins (see the “unwittinglies” in Leviticus 4:2, 13, 22, 27), but people could even be forgiven sins that seemed deliberate (Leviticus 6:2 and following).

Read Hebrews 10:26-31. In this passage the author of

Hebrews singles out deliberate or willful sins, but states that sinning deliberately is much more than just committing a sin on purpose. The sin the author refers to in these verses is **apostasy**, that is, a deliberate rejection of the Christian faith (remember we ran into **apostasy** in Session 6?).

7. What are the marks of deliberate sin according to Hebrews 10:26, 29? Why does the author say that such people will be judged rather than forgiven?

Warning and promise are side by side in Hebrews 10. The future of those who sin willfully (see verses 26-31) contrasts with the assurance and encouragement found earlier in verses 19-25.

Verse 30 quotes Deuteronomy 32:35-36, which is part of the Song of Moses. This song contrasts Israel's faithlessness with God's faithfulness and warns that God will punish those who rebel.

8. What do you think is the relationship between Hebrews 10:30-31 with verses 19-25? What place does verse 31 have in the Christian life?

Read verses 32-39. The letter to the Hebrews was written to people who had become "dull" (5:11) and "sluggish" in their faith (6:12) and community life (10:25). In 10:32-39 the author reminds them that their faith had flourished in more difficult times.

In the past, some of them had been publicly exposed to abuse, had been imprisoned and had lost property after their conversion to Christianity. Yet these Christians responded by remaining loyal to their persecuted sisters and brothers in the faith and by showing compassion to the prisoners.

• Why and how do difficult circumstances sometimes help to build a sense of community? How do the memories of such times help, in a more comfortable time, to preserve community?

Verse 39 ends a major section of the book by stating the author's hope that those who have faith will "keep their souls." So far the author has shown that Jesus Christ is the one who makes us one with God. He has encouraged Christians to hold fast to the promises of the gospel, to grow in the faith and to do good works.

The author has contrasted the work of Christ with that of Old Testament priests, sanctuary and covenant. He has warned against falling away from or neglecting the faith. The author has prepared the readers for some of the most inspiring chapters in all of Scripture, the soaring hymn to God that is Hebrews 11, and 12.

Praying

Lord, we wait patiently for you. Let us stand firmly upon your promises. Put a new song in our hearts, a song of praise to you, O God. Sacrifices and offerings you do not desire, but instead a heart that is open for you to write your holy name upon. May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. May those who love you say, "Great is the Lord." In your holy name, we pray. Amen (adapted from Psalm 40).

Looking Ahead

Holding high the torch of biblical heroism, Hebrews 11:1-40 invites faith in the hearts of each new generation of Christians. In preparation for the next session, learn Hebrews 11: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Nancy and Craig Koester are Evangelical Lutheran Church in America pastors. They live in St. Paul, Minnesota, where Craig teaches New Testament at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary (LNTS). Nancy holds a doctoral degree in church history from LNTS.

The Unshakable Kingdom: A Study of Hebrews is prepared by members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America under the direction of the Rev. Karen Battle, director for educational resources. Associate editor, Liv Rosin. Copyright © 1994.

Pastor Barbara Westhoff greets the Anderson family. Westhoff serves the three-point parish of Westby Lutheran.



Provoking One Another

Avis R. Anderson

Cars and pickups are parked around the edges of the city park in the small town. In the park, chairs are arranged in rows, the public address system is set up and the hum of conversation is punctuated by occasional laughter and voices raised in greeting. Soon the service begins. Voices from three congregations rise together in a song and prayer service, followed by a potluck. Most people stay until mid-afternoon, enjoying a visit with neighbors they don't often see. It is the annual parish picnic of the Westby

Lutheran Church, a three-point congregation located in the rural, isolated northeastern corner of Montana.

For the past seven years, Pastor Barbara Westhoff has served this Evangelical Lutheran Church in America parish. Emmaus and St. John's are rural congregations. Immanuel is in the town of Westby. Pastor Westhoff is involved in the development of this community that straddles the North Dakota-Montana border. Besides her duties as pastor, she serves as treasurer of the Crisis Center for Domestic and Sexual Abuse, which serves two counties and is a member of the Westby Development Corporation—a group organized to promote economic growth in the area. "There is a myth that says rural people aren't advocates. I know people here don't see themselves as advocates, but they are always there to help," Pastor Barb comments.

How do members of a congregation *provoke one another to love and good deeds . . . meet together . . . encourage one another . . .* (Hebrews 10:24-25)? Avis Anderson asked this question of a three-point, rural congregation in Montana. This is what she found.

—Ed.

Stories of change and compromise

ere roots are sunk deep into the
nd, and the church has served
enerations of families. Yet
change and compromise are in the
r, with new develop-
ent, new people, new
eas and new ways of do-
g things. For instance,
Because the winter
eather is unpredictable,
e women of St. John's
utheran quilt in the sum-
er.

Search Bible study ses-
ons are open to the whole
mmunity. Two sessions
e offered each year be-
ween harvesting and
anting, a 10-year com-
mitment.

When government pro-
ams demanded environ-
mentally conscious farm-
g, Eric Nielsen, a mem-
er of Emmaus Lutheran, joined a
rm club in Sheridan County
hich is testing the yield of dry-
nd peas to dry-land wheat. "It
kes a different way of thinking.
change is hard, but the results are
citing," Nielsen remarks.

Stories of comfort and community

ie Hagan, the community chair
r the Immanuel Lutheran
omen of the ELCA feels called to
ission in her small community of
estby. She counsels women who
ieve, drawing from the experi-
ce of losing her mother when
e was only nine. Westby has no
otels, so with her husband,
ellis, Hagan opened a bed-and-
reakfast. Serving hunters and
e occasional traveler, she hopes

their B & B will encourage other
small businesses to open.

Immanuel's president, Doris
Retzer, sees church members as
close-knit and supportive of each
other. In a community of 250



**Sue Hagan— shown here with her hus-
band, Ellis, and children Alyson and
Chet— feels called to mission in Westby.**

people, religious differences do not
mean a great deal when people are
hurting. Westby's prayer chain is
an ecumenical network of Chris-
tians. "The prayer chain is par-
ticularly important," Doris says.
"People feel helpless in time of
need, but know they can pray.
There is power in prayer and it
means so much to those who are
receiving the prayers."

Stories of a corporation

Immanuel is the result of the
merger of five rural congregations.
The decline in membership over
many years was indicative of the
problems facing rural North
Americans everywhere. Survival
became a key element of discus-
sions in the town and in the
church. In 1989, thirteen commu-

"Change is hard, but the results are exciting," says Eric Nielsen, shown here with his son, Taylor.

nity residents were far-sighted enough to form the Westby Development Corporation (WDC). Members of Immanuel and Emmaus have served on the Board as officers and on committees.

Ellis Hagan notes that "the Montana Synod of the ELCA was very supportive of our efforts. Cathi Braasch, then deployed mission director with the ELCA Division for Outreach, now the ELCA Director for Rural Ministry, and Bishop Ramseth met with us and encouraged our attempts at development. Pastor Westhoff has also been supportive. They helped us see a wider world."

With a letter of support written by the church council at Immanuel, the Westby Development Corporation was successful in receiving a grant from the ELCA through the Montana Synod. Cathi Braasch came as a consultant to aid in developing a strategic plan and to assist people in seeing the possibilities when church and community work together. Doris Retzer remembers that Braasch helped the group move from setting goals to "doing something."

The next step was more grant writing, resulting in the WDC receiving \$147,000 from the Department of Commerce for rehabilitation of 16 dwellings. Ellis Hagan, active in the Small Town And Rural Organization, said, "Cathi gave the community a better feeling about itself and the whole idea of developing some credibility."



Stories of charity and commitment

Toni Soderquist is president of the Women of the ELCA at St. John's yoked with Emmaus and Immanuel but with closer ties to Plentywood, a larger town about 30 miles west of Westby. "Do we have a sense of mission? People get spread pretty thin in a small congregation. Well, we do what we can do," Toni laughs.

"What we can do" includes raising \$600 at a yearly bake sale and luncheon, held at a bank in Plentywood. Breads, lefse and doughnuts turn into money to help save the Plentywood radio station support ELCA churchwide ministries, World Hunger, Lutheran Social Services, the Rescue Mission in Billings, Montana, and Eastmont Human Services Center in Glendive, Montana, and more. Six to ten women work on quilts in the summer. The quilts go to Lutheran World Relief, the local nursing home and to the county.

Emmaus Lutheran congregation lies about 12 miles southwest of Westby. Founded by Scandinavian homesteaders, many of Emmaus' members are older. Irene Nielsen, president of the

Women of the ELCA at Emmaus, says that benevolence giving in relation to congregational numbers is good. Like St. John's, the members stretch their time and multiply their talents. Six women working at home and at the church quickly made 19 quilts. A yearly bazaar raises money for World Hunger and collects nonperishable items for the welfare office in Bentleywood.

Emmaus' Women of the ELCA has a strong sense of mission and supports bread for the World, the Miles City Rural Cancer Care Foundation, Lutheran Social Services, Lutheran Campus Ministry, as well as Logodius (a spiritual renewal program).

The Emmaus women donated a quilt to the churchwide assembly in Kansas City, Missouri. Their quilt was selected and sold along with others at the assembly, raising money for Lutheran World Relief.

Immanuel Women of the ELCA supports 10 charities each year and pays one-third the cost of Bible camp for children. Immanuel congregation supports at Bentsen, a missionary to Madagascar, gives to Lutheran Social Services, Montana Rescue Mission in Billings, and was one of two congregations in Montana to donate to the synod for seminary student aid.

Confession of hope

Emmaus, St. John's and Immanuel Lutheran churches share a common desire—that of bringing the Word to its people. Although they recognize that declining memberships can be a painful reality, they refuse to give in to despair. All the parishes see themselves as part of a larger



Women at Immanuel Lutheran prepare to make quilts for Lutheran World Relief.

church body. Their benevolence travels the globe and "just down the road." In thought and action, the Westby parish works to put the words of Hebrews 10:23-25 into action: "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. . . . And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together . . . but encouraging one another. . . ." **AC**

Avis R. Anderson, Glendive, Montana, is a high school teacher, librarian and free-lance writer. She participates in Western North Dakota Synod's GIFTS program to train and educate laity.

Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

♦ ELCA helps you respond to racial hate groups

The ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries, in its new resource "No Hate Allowed," lists 10 points to remember when you respond to hate groups. Among other things, the booklet urges that you stay informed, speak out and match the solution to the problem. Call The ELCA Distribution Center at 1-800-328-4648 to order your copy for \$4. Order code no. 69-7007.

Creator of All, help us acknowledge our own sins of racism. Move us to become ambassadors of reconciliation.

♦ Women's ordination rocks Nigerian church

The Anglican Church in Nigeria has declared "null and void" the ordination of three women by Herbert Haruna, Anglican Bishop of Kwara. Disciplinary action was taken against Haruna, who said he might protest to the Church of England. Meanwhile a prominent Dutch theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx, said the Roman Catholic Church must prepare for women priests. "The exclusion of women from the ministry is a purely cultural issue, which no longer makes sense," Schillebeeckx said.

God of All, bring peace and unity to those churches divided over the issue of women's ordination.

♦ First Eskimo is ordained

Lutherans in the Seward Peninsula of Alaska are celebrating 100 years of Lutheran work in the area this month. In April ELCA members in the peninsula joined with others in the synod in joyful celebration of the ordination of the first Inupiaq, the Rev. Stewart Davis. The 63-year-old Davis is serving in a newly created chaplaincy position with native Alaskans in Anchorage.

Eternal God, bless the ministries of Stewart Davis and all native Alaskans as they celebrate 100 years of Lutheranism.

♦ Confiscated Lutheran church restored in Russia

A Lutheran church building in Lenin's birthplace of Ulanovo has been reopened. St. Mary's church was confiscated in 1932 and its pastor shot. The derelict building, returned to church authorities in 1991, was restored with help from German churches.

Light of the World, as buildings are restored in Russia, so also let the gospel spread with renewed vigor.

Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news editor of The Lutheran.

ACG

Open to the Mystery of Prayer

Jean Johansson

***Let my prayer rise before
you as incense; the lifting
of my hands as the
burning sacrifice.***

These words from the Evening Prayer Psalmody (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 145), have become a powerful image of prayer for me. On those occasions when incense has been burned during Evening Prayer, I have watched the fragrant smoke waft upward and disappear. This image helps me spiritually connect with the mystery of prayer. In such a way do my words travel to the origin of my being.

For most of my life I thought of prayer primarily as asking for something. It has taken me until mid-life to begin to

appreciate the richness of prayer, the many varieties of prayer, and the different ways of communicating with God. Striving to pray consciously keeps God at the forefront of my life as the guide of my journey.

During difficult times in my life I've said prayers of lament and anger, challenging God to show me why something that seems to me to run so counter to God's intent is happening, and asking God to guide me in my response. The answer seldom arrives immediately. Rather, I've discovered that often the answer comes piecemeal, developing a pattern over time. Eventually all the pieces come together and the answer appears, the way a jigsaw puzzle picture takes shape or the

way a picture hidden in intricate designs pops into view if we focus our eyes "just so" and stare at the pattern long enough.

Lately, I am increasingly drawn to the words of Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God," and by the "still small voice" of 1 Kings 19:12. When I turn away from my busyness to the gift of prayer, I open myself to communion with God.

As a member of the prayer chain at my congregation, I have been amazed at the intimate attach-

**When I turn away from my
busyness to the gift of prayer,
I open myself to communion
with God.**

ment I come to have for people I've been requested to pray for. This feeling has been especially striking when praying for someone I have never met, may never meet, and who may—in all likelihood—never even know I am praying for them. It has been an eloquent reminder that we are all sisters and brothers, children of God, bearing each other's sorrows and delighting in each other's joys. It has helped me embrace the mystery of prayer, and I have been surprised by grace in return. **CG**

Jean Johansson is a member of Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She works as administrative assistant to the editor of the Metro Lutheran.

Two Faces

Kay A. Bengston

Yvette had worked for the phone company for years. When she left her home because of an abusive husband, she lost her housing and her job. Yvette, a person who once had given her own clothes to the poor, was now wearing second-hand clothes herself.

She finally found an apartment and began looking for work. But then drug addicts took over the top floor of her apartment building. She could hear frequent screams and shots, and police and "crackheads" ran in and out at all hours. She couldn't risk leaving her three children to look for a job, so she remained on welfare.

The conditions finally became more than she could take, so she left with nothing more than the clothes on her back. Once again she was homeless.

Yvette is now living in transitional housing waiting for an apartment. She has passed civil service tests and regularly checks the job listings hoping to become employed.

Yvette waits for a job, waits for permanent housing, and waits for day care. She's been waiting for some time.

Abandoned by her husband who neglected to make child support payments, Kathy, a young nurse, found it difficult to support her two children. Her four-year-

old son developed a serious disease necessitating respiratory equipment and round-the-clock nursing care. She quit her job to stay at home with her son and applied for AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children).

The meager income from AFDC threatened her ability to pay even her electric bill, leaving her son tremendously vulnerable. She took a part-time job in a nursing home to help, but neglected to report it. When the system caught up with her, she was charged with felony welfare fraud and owed the government over \$2000.

These are the faces of welfare recipients. The vast majority want to support their families and provide the best for them. The Division for Church in Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has prepared "Working Principles for Welfare Reform" to guide churches as they seek to debate and address this crucial issue. Contact the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs, (202) 783-7507 for copy. **AC**

—Kay A. Bengston

SisterCare is a regular column prepared for LWT by Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs staff.

REVIEWS

by Day Through the Gospel Mark: A Devotional Bible Study
Merrill and Olga Gilbertson
Augsburg Fortress, 1993;
(\$14.99).

This intensive Bible study, for individual or group use, offers a daily plan for examining the book of Mark. Each of the 100 lessons includes short passages from the book, along with brief commentaries and questions designed for discussion and reflection.

The suggested method of study includes prayer, close reading, memorization and the use of a devotional journal. This is a highly organized, well-written study with thought-provoking questions.

Della Smith
Nutley, New Jersey

Dismantling Racism

by Joseph Barndt (*Augsburg Fortress, 1991; \$14.99*).

Are you a racist? Before you answer this question read Joseph Barndt's book *Dismantling Racism*. Barndt, a white man, maintains that all Whites in the United States are racist even without personal intent, and even against their wills.

Barndt's definition of racism is "prejudice plus power." All peoples of all races have prejudices, but in the United States society, only the white race has the power to en-

force its prejudices.

Barndt looks at how the racist system functions in our society and how Christians can combat the anesthesia that imprisons them in it. This is a book that requires courage to buy and read . . . but it is a courage that God gives us in Jesus Christ.

Alicia Vargas
San Leandro, California

Coya Come Home

by Gretchen Urnes Beito
(*Pomegranate Press, Ltd, 1990;*
to order send \$19.95 plus \$3.00
postage and handling to Pome-
granate Press, 12161 Valleyheart
Dr., Studio City, CA 91604).

This is an intimate, biographical account of Coya Gjesdal Knutson, a spirited middle-aged farm wife from the Midwest, and how she realized her dream of a successful political career.

The story begins with Coya's childhood as the daughter of Norwegian immigrant farmers. It depicts how her farming background aided her in eventually being elected to the U.S. Congress in 1954.

In an act of jealousy, Coya's husband ultimately destroys her political career by releasing a letter to the press demanding that she abandon her political aspirations and return home to be a full-time housewife, falsely implying

an extra-marital affair.

This book gives us a fascinating glimpse into the political—and social—scene of the 1950s. It is a joy to read of such a strong female role model.

*Martha Nelson Anderson
Bloomington, Minnesota*

Elisabeth and the Water-Troll

*by Walter Wangerin, Jr.
(HarperCollins, 1991; \$14.95)*

This is the story of a girl's encounter with grief and the unexpected source of her healing.

After her mother's death, Elisabeth flees into the woods to pour out her anger and sadness. A water-troll hears her and vows to show her that "life is lovelier than bad"; that she is loved, and not alone.

The story's mystical settings and characters, depicted in warm illustrations by Deborah Healy, give it the feel of a classic fairy tale. This enchanting story doesn't offer a sugar-coated answer to loss; it reveals the real, healing power of the gospel.

*Marcia Erickson Bates
Melrose Park, Illinois*

Living with Dying: A Guide for Relatives and Friends

*by Glen W. Davidson (Augsburg,
1990; \$5.99)*

This book could be invaluable for all who face death and for those who love them. The meaning of death is discussed in five particu-

lar ways: when it means loss, change, conflict, suffering, and finally triumph. Case histories from the author's clinical background in psychiatry are used to illustrate the various meanings.

The final chapter on the triumph possible in death is especially meaningful. The author says, "Life completed is life related, invested with love, and full of meaning."

*Virginia Knudtson
Prescott, Arizona*

Gospel-Centered Spirituality

*by Allan H. Sager (Augsburg
Fortress, 1990; \$10.99).*

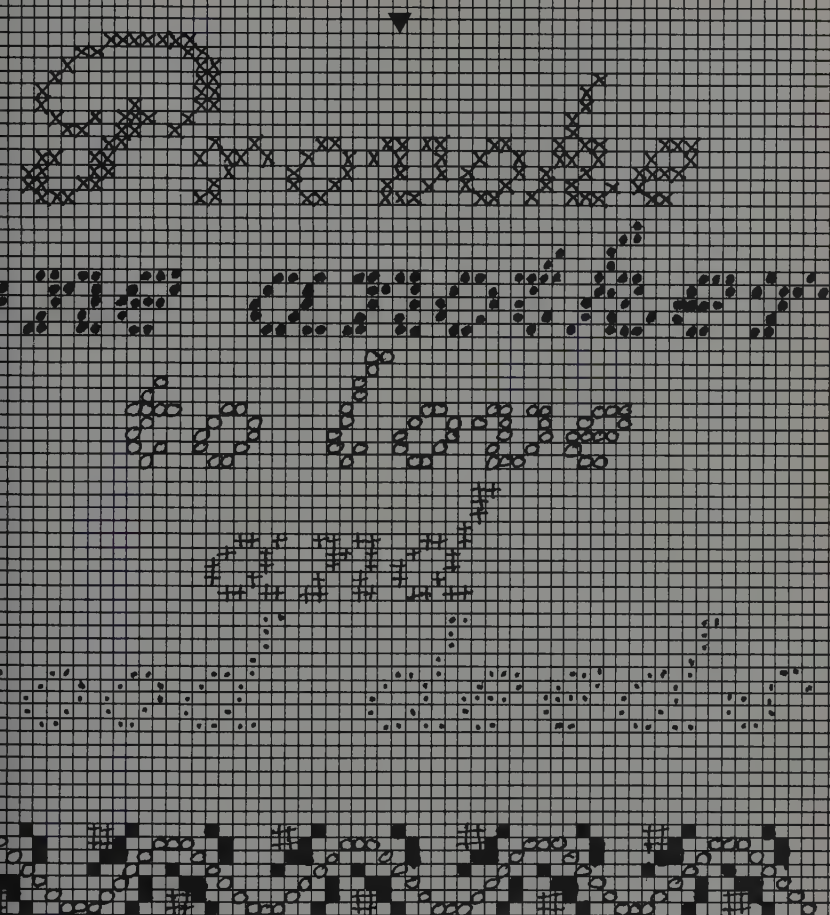
Interested in spirituality? Seminary professor Allan Sager's book fulfills two purposes. First, he offers a gospel-centered perspective on the nature of Christian spirituality, and secondly he introduces spiritual topics for those unfamiliar with Christian spirituality tradition.

Eager to identify your personal spiritual type? Take the self-scoring test in Chapter 2. By discovering a preference for The Inner Life, Societal Regeneration, Theological Renewal or Personal Renewal, you gain insight into spiritual behavior patterns.

Allan Sager shares his own spiritual journey. He writes, "Immaturity considers the Lord Jesus a helper. Maturity knows him to be life itself."

*Phyllis Beckman
Park Forest, Illinois*

Counted Cross-stitch



DMC Floss

X 210

● 334

○X 503

■ 502

+ 3733

■ 402

+

Color

purple

blue

light green

dark green

pink

orange

Charted by Betty Christiansen

Missing Persons

As September comes around again, thousands of parents will be taking their children to college, many to one of our 29 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America institutions. There, in schools founded on faith, these young people will have experiences that will stretch their minds and extend their horizons. They will encounter new ideas, new lifestyles, new role models.

But, sadly, many of the young women will look in vain for female role models among the senior leadership of the schools they attend! At the end of the 1993-94 academic year, there still are no women presidents among the leaders of the 29 ELCA colleges and universities. There are only six women academic vice presidents among all the senior academic administrators in those 29 schools. Young women may find female role models in the Student Affairs office, and some in Admissions or Financial Aid; but in the senior academic positions on our campuses women are "missing persons."

I began my career teaching at one of our ELCA colleges. I left there in 1961 for graduate work, to prepare for work in college teaching and administration. If someone had told me then that there was no point in preparing for a career in academic administration because, 30 years later, there would still be no women among

our Lutheran college presidents, would not have believed it.

What can we do?

We can ask questions. As we take our daughters to ELCA colleges and universities, we can ask "Where are the senior women at these institutions? Where are the tenured women professors? Where are the women academic vice presidents? Where are the women presidents?"

Through the Academic Leadership Scholarships, Women of the

In the senior academic positions on our campuses women are "missing persons."

ELCA provides support to women faculty and staff members at ELCA colleges and seminaries to help them participate in management training opportunities so they can move into leadership positions at their schools.

But we need to do more. We must hold the schools of the church accountable for policies that keep women out of senior leadership positions. We must work toward the day when there will be women in significant numbers in all the top leadership positions of our ELCA colleges and seminaries.

Charlotte E. Fiechter
Executive Director

MISSION: ACTION

Provoking Women to Action

Each year at this time we encourage participation in Peace with Justice Week—held yearly from October 16 to October 24. This year there is special reason for all of us to get involved.

In 1994 the Women of the ELCA Women and Children in Poverty has as its family: *We're All in This Together*. Violence in schools and neighborhoods has reached alarming levels. According to the Children's Defense Fund, 768 children younger than 15 are killed in the year by firearms! Is this just part of life," or can we do something about it?

Yes, we can do something about it, and one way is to celebrate "Children's Sabbath" on Sunday, October 16. The Children's Defense Fund, the sponsor of this special religious observance for children, is cooperating for the second year in Peace with Justice Week.

Protestant, Catholic and Jewish congregations all will mark the event the same weekend in a massive celebration of children. This year's service will take a stand against violence.

Organizing kits are available. In them you'll find suggested sermons and prayers, bulletin inserts, adult education materials,

and children's activities. Send \$3 to cover postage and handling to Children's Sabbaths, CDF, 25 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001. Specify that you want the kit for Protestants.

Materials for Peace with Justice Week has been observed for over a decade by more than 50 national faith and peace groups in hundreds of communities across the country. Materials for it can be ordered from Peace with Justice Week, Office for World Community, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 670, New York, NY 10115. Phone 212/870-2424. FAX 212/870-2055.

"Beloved Community," the theme of Peace with Justice Week, reminds us of the need to work in coalitions in our communities to reduce violence and bring justice to local situations.

Be perturbed about violence in our society. Galvanize your community to have an ecumenical Children's Sabbath. And make your entire Peace with Justice Week observance meaningful. Provoke others to action through your enthusiasm and commitment.

*Joan B. Pope
Director for Peace
With Justice*

MISSION: COMMUNITY

Hopeful Provocation

"Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together . . . but encouraging one another . . ."

(Hebrews 10:23,24).

Even as Christians, it is sometimes a struggle to hold onto "God's Gift of Hope" when in society we are surrounded by so much hopelessness and despair. The women's organization in your congregation can be one place where women come together to encourage one another by sharing God's gift of hope in their life.

Because women today have more choices and less time than their mothers did, they tend to be more selective in how they choose to spend their time and energy. If we are to "provoke," or call forth, our sisters into considering Women of the ELCA as one of their choices, it is important that we get to know them and meet them wherever they are in their spiritual journey and daily ministries.

We tend, as a church and an organization, to become so absorbed in what we have to offer, that we think no one can refuse. Precisely because there are so

many good choices, so many worthwhile things women can do, we must be very intentional in "provoking" women to help. Women of the ELCA carry out its aims . . . to care about families in poverty . . . to want to learn about "Embracing Self and Others" . . . to be excited about "The Witness of Women" evangelism strategy. . .

But before we can stir people to such involvement, we need to help them see that we do care about who they are and what's going on in their lives. When they understand how vital they are to us and the Women of the ELCA community, then we can provoke them and one another . . . to love and do good works.

For information on expanding community within your congregation and reaching out to new members, contact Dolores Yancey, 1-800-638-3522 ext. 2739. For "Embracing Self and Others" contact Beckie Steele ext. 2428. For "Witness of Women," contact Valora Starbuck ext. 2741. For "We're All in This Together," contact Marlene Narbert, ext. 2747.

*Dolores Yancey
Director for Community
and Organizational
Development*

MISSION: GROWTH

Ancestor or Descendant?

Mission: Growth takes its cue from the Women of the ELCA purpose statement: to help women grow in faith, affirm their gifts, and support one another in their callings.

From this definition, the essential ingredient for all women is to have a faith! Can we assume that we all do *have a faith in Jesus Christ* that is based on personal experience, knowledge and commitment? Let's think about that. In my life, my faith has gone through many stages. There was a time in my early life when it was simply a knowledge-based faith. There have been times when it was a "Sunday" faith, and, in times of despair, when it seemed no faith at all. Am I typical of women in our organization? I suppose so.

It is with these kinds of realities in mind, that we need always to look at the reason for our existence as an organization: we claim a faith in Jesus Christ. We know we have been saved from destruction and will live with Christ forever. And from that knowledge we want to serve our Lord—as we drink coffee with a friend, prepare a report at work, discuss a church issue, say hello to the bank teller, share our lives with our children,

and listen patiently to a friend in need.

We can only do these things if we are continually refreshed by our experiences with our Lord—in good Christian fellowship, in learning about our faith through Bible study, in seeking out people from whom we can learn.

On Easter the pastor of our congregation challenged us to ask ourselves how our generation as Christians would be viewed historically. Would we, he asked, be thought of as ancestors of our faith, or as descendants of it? Wow—what a question! Most often I've thought of myself as a descendant . . . a descendant of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob . . . a descendent of Walter and Ardinell Williamson (my parents). . . .

But, could I really be called to be an *ancestor*? To provide a faith model for others and be a saint within the community? Could someone one day think of me as an ancestor in their faith life?

Mission: Growth challenges us all to understand and practice our faith: to be both ancestor and descendant.

*Beckie M. Steele
Director for Leadership
Development*

Provoked by Pain

No, it can't be true. No, I refuse to believe this is happening. God, why is this happening?

It was an ordinary day in March. I was at work consumed with daily, routine tasks, unaware that life was about to take a radical turn. Then my good friend whom I have known since grade-school, called. And at the instant that he said, "I just found out I have AIDS" the full force of my love for him turned to a pain that took my breath away. And I didn't know what to do.

So I went into autopilot. In that instant I turned in to my mother, and did what she would do. I ran to him, held him and put him on a plane home. And now, a year later we are both very different people. We are on a journey together.

**Sometimes
events come
in the form
of tragedy.
Where is
the holy
provocation
in that?**

Provocation comes in all kinds of packaging. In this case, it came wrapped in layers of pain and fear, and neither I nor my friend wanted to accept it. But on that day—a day enveloped in the numbness of shock, and etched in my memory forever—my friend and I took our first steps on this new spiritual journey together. We are on a path of discovery about ourselves, each other, our friendship, and we are learning that God has indeed built into us the capabilities to be strong, courageous, hopeful and even thankful. Something good is coming from something bad.

There is no greater gift from a friend than the invitation to walk with them through life's great challenges. God has given each of us gifts, and usually life's great challenges provoke us to discover and use them. The gift of insight helps us discover the meaning in this suffering. The gift of healing helps us start each day with a renewed spirit. The gift of faith reminds us that God is with us and we need not be afraid.

Life on this earth is full of all kinds of hard things. And challenge is an everyday part of our existence. Just think of the many phrases we often use to sort through the challenges: "Look on the bright side!" "You have to take the good with the bad." "Every cloud has a silver

ing." "For every door that is shut, God opens a window."
try to find the provocation to discover good in everyday
allenges.

But sometimes events come in the form of tragedy, and
seems to be absolutely no silver lining, no ready
rases. Where is the holy provocation in that?

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). The Lutheran
DS Network. Compassionate Friends. Mothers Against
ngs. Victims rights groups. Rape crisis centers. Shelters
battered women and children. Many people have found
ir God-given courage to form and join such groupings,
d have allowed tragedy to provoke them to make good
ial changes—changes to help prevent tragedy in the
es of others.

None of us wants to experience pain and fear. But God
s given us gifts, and we can use them to help create good
of pain, to become stronger and grasp our full potential.
friend and I are still walking together. We don't know
v long the journey will last, or where each turn will take
but we know our journey leads to God. **ACG**

Cynthia J. Mickelson

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